



August 21, 2002

Mr. Duncan C. Norton
General Counsel
Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission
P.O. Box 13087
Austin, Texas 78711-3087

OR2002-4653

Dear Mr. Norton:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 167394.

The Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (the "commission") received a request for documents related to the commission's "deliberations and final decision (including appeals), particularly those of the Chairman, Commissioners, the Commission's General Counsel and the Agency's Executive Director, on the application by the Texas Low Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Authority for a permit and license to build and operate a low-level radioactive waste disposal facility." You state that the commission has released a portion of the responsive information to the requestor. You also state that the Executive Director's records staff is handling the portion of the request regarding responsive documents maintained by the Executive Director or his staff and, thus, you are only addressing the documents maintained by the Commissioners or the Commission's Office of General Counsel. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. In instances where an attorney represents a governmental entity, the attorney-client privilege protects only an attorney's legal advice and the client's confidences made to the attorney. *See* Open Records Decision No. 574 (1990). Accordingly, these two classes of information are the only information contained in the records at issue that may be withheld pursuant to the attorney-client privilege. You state that it is the job of the General Counsel and his assistant counsels to "brief[] each Commissioner individually and provid[e] legal advice on matters set on the Commission's public meetings calender" and that "[t]hese communications are embodied in legal memoranda and documents . . . which are provided to the Commissioners in cases involving contested

matters during the period they are reviewing the records in such contested cases.” Based on your representations and our review of the submitted information, we agree that Attachment E consists of attorney advice and opinion and may be withheld under section 552.107. As we are able to make this determination, we need not address your remaining arguments.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov’t Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body’s intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



W. Montgomery Meitler
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

WMM/sdk

Ref: ID# 167394

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Lawrence R. Jacobi, Jr., P.E.
Jacobi Consulting
10716 Pickfair Drive
Austin, Texas 78750-4012
(w/o enclosures)